



# Merkur Scorpio

*May we show you something in an anti-Mercedes?*

• Automotive historians will look back on the eighties as the decade in which the Ford Motor Company emerged as an independent thinker on a global scale. Simultaneously, Dearborn produced the remarkable Taurus/Sable, Ford's Asian affiliates got together on a range of efficient small cars, and Ford of Europe had the nerve to create an autobahn express that doesn't pay homage to Mercedes. In fact, the Scorpio takes no inspiration from anything on the road. It's a new definition of bucks-up automobiling.

The radical approach doesn't stop with the car's shape and mechanical layout, either. When the Scorpio goes on sale here this spring, as a 1988 model, Ford will guarantee its resale value. The promise is that your Scorpio will retain the same percentage of its retail price as the Mercedes 190E in the period between two and four years after its sale (assuming that you trade for another Merkur or a Lincoln). If it doesn't, Ford will send you a check for the difference.

That's even gutsier than making an expensive four-door that deviates from the traditional three-box silhouette. There is

no track record of customer willingness to pay Audi 5000 prices (the target of the base U.S. Scorpio) for cars with ski-jump hind ends. The Scorpio is a hatchback, and it looks the part; it's a cough-drop-shaped car that every Harvard M.B.A. would say is wrong for the market, at least the American market.

Still, customers who are willing to pay prestige prices for a model that no one will ever confuse with a Mercedes will get something else for their money. The Scorpio has more useful interior room than any other car in its class. The long roof provides headroom for a rear seat positioned farther aft than usual. The payoff is limousine-style legroom and kneeroom—or you can fold the rear seatbacks down (they have a 60-40 split) to expand the cargo capacity in typical hatchback style.

An extra attraction is a rear seat that folds completely out of the way. Pivot the bottom cushion up and forward, then fold the seatbacks down into the vacated space, and you've got a station-wagon-flat load floor. That floor is a bit on the narrow side—at 69.5 inches wide, the Scorpio is 1.2 inches skinnier than the Taurus—but

there is still room for three-across seating in back if you really need it. The narrow width helps aero drag a little (the Cd is 0.33) and makes parking slots seem wider.

For those confident enough of their status to drive an astutely designed car, no matter what it looks like, the Scorpio will be an attractive package. But the typical American buyer will probably have reservations. In any case, there won't ever be enough Scorpions sold in the U.S. to make the shape common. Ford expects 700 Merkur dealers to sell a total of 15,000 Scorpions a year, which isn't many compared with the flow of such competitors as the Audi 5000, the Mercedes 190E, the BMW 5-series, the Volvo 700-series, and the Acura Legend. (Another rival, the Saab 9000 series, sells in somewhat smaller volumes.)

The situation is different in Europe, however, where aerodynamic shapes are becoming the norm: the Scorpio, now entering its third year, is second only to Mercedes in sales in its class. The Scorpio has earned an arm's-length list of accolades, including the European Car of the Year Award in 1986. It outsells the BMW





5-series in Germany and owns 25 percent of the executive class in England. In Europe, you might say, the Scorpio is what's happening in the high end of the market.

Since the whole idea of the Merkur line is to provide a European choice at your local Lincoln-Mercury store, the Scorpio is very little changed for the U.S. Only the top-of-the-line version is being imported. It's powered by a fuel-injected, 2.9-liter V-6 that drives the rear wheels. Its output is 144 horsepower, identical to the European version's. Anti-lock brakes are standard, as in the European car. The suspension we get is unchanged, too, except for those changes required to get rid of the European car's nose-down rake, which is good for autobahn aerodynamics but bad to American eyes, according to pre-introduction styling clinics.

In addition to the generous interior space, Ford reckons the Scorpio's luxu interior appointments will be a major attraction in the U.S. market. This is not one of those hard-butt German cars that make you comply with somebody's rigid ideas of proper driving posture. The front seats have real padding under their covers and

are adjustable sixteen ways, the rear seatbacks adjust over a fifteen-degree angle with power recliners, the steering column tilts and telescopes, crinkly-looking leather is available, the dashboard has a token insert of beautifully finished wood, and all the molded padding on the dashboard and the windowsills has the right no-shine texture. The interior ambience is plush but businesslike, the other side of the world from Lincoln.

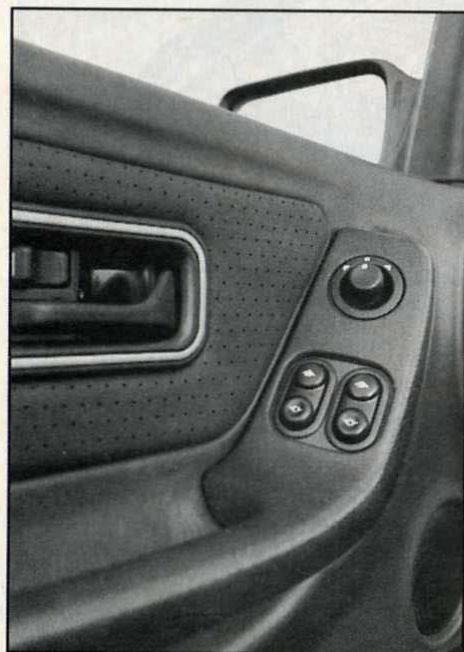
The Scorpio doesn't move like a Lincoln, either. While others may be impressed by the accommodations, we'll save our raves for the over-the-road dynamics. This car is a model of equanimity. The suspension gives the ride a liquid motion; the Scorpio flows over the road, undaunted by broken surfaces, unfettered by crosswinds, unchallenged by speed. Chassis engineers speak of suspension "memory": When you hit a bump, or make a steering deviation, how long does it take the car to regain its composure? How long does it remember the disruption? The Scorpio's suspension sets the standard for short memory. What's past is forgotten, which means the car never dallies in the

recovery process when you throw something new at it. This is the mark of a good high-speed car: it's always ready for your next move.

The Scorpio is a German car, made in Cologne, and its autobahn breeding is apparent. The steering has a relatively strong return-to-center feel, and it's very slow to move off center. This is typical of good autobahn tuning; at three-digit speeds, you don't want a sneeze to land your butt in the ditch. In addition to a good dose of caster in the front suspension, the Scorpio has a variable-ratio steering gear that is quite slow on center. The result is a car that is very happy on the Interstates but a bit languid in urban motoring. You feel exceptional poise rather than sportiness. The Scorpio doesn't give you the quick grin that comes in a BMW. It's ready for anything, but it doesn't seem eager to prove its readiness.

Nor is it a lot of grins with a five-speed. Ford expects that only three out of twenty American Scorpio buyers will choose the manual. The shifter works fine, no hang-ups, but there is no snick-snick, either. The linkage is too well damped to have





much mechanical feel. Low speed in low gear produces some jerkiness in the drivetrain, albeit silky jerkiness, and that also isn't a lot of grins. And the gear ratios seem very long, chosen more for economy than for performance. For these reasons, but mostly because the languid tempo of the car seems inappropriate to shifting, we'd opt for the four-speed automatic. The automatic Scorpio behaves nicely. It does display Ford's paranoia about the park-into-reverse controversy, however: you move the console-mounted lever through a notchy labyrinth to select the gears, and you have to press it down before it will move from the park-reverse area. Rocking the Scorpio out of a snowbank would be difficult. Just backing it out of a garage is annoying.

The manual has a similar annoyance. The gear lever must be in neutral before the engine will start, which means a blur of right-hand motions if you kill the engine in traffic: shift to neutral, turn the key to

full off, turn it back to start, reach for first gear. The clutch-to-the-floor starting requirement of GM and other manufacturers is a better idea.

While we're complaining, the power seat controls have an obtuse logic, and the squeeze-bulb lumbar inflators look a bit obscene. (Why not electric pumps, which are optional in the Taurus?) The climate-control system blows noisily, with odd and uncalled-for changes of temperature. (The automatic system in the Taurus is superior.) And the console-mounted button for the electric gas-door release falls readily to something, because people are always coming up and saying, "Do you know your gas door is open?"

Despite these complaints, the Scorpio seems to be a high-quality car. The body is tight and free of quivers. The door and seat latches work beautifully. The interior is wonderfully silent at speed. The car feels its price. It's a first-class compartment for covering the miles.

The Scorpio is a fast car, too, though not a quick one. It has long legs. At speed readings in the high double digits, the Scorpio is so relaxed that the driver suspects inflation. But getting up there takes a while. With the manual transmission, 0 to 60 mph takes 9.6 seconds, and the quarter-mile comes up in 17.1 seconds at



81 mph. Nothing here to get your blood pressure up.

Stops from 70 mph take 191 feet—not as good as we expect with anti-lock brakes. Interestingly, Ford says that the advantage of the anti-lock system is controllability, not shorter stops—though the spokesman acknowledges that shorter stops are usually achieved, particularly on slippery surfaces.

Buyers of expensive cars expect features to show off to the neighbors, and the Scorpio has its share. The power recliners for the rear seatbacks ought to score high at show-and-tell time. The Scorpio also has an unusual key design; it fits the ignition, door, and rear-deck locks, which are said to be pickproof. Certainly the key is a puzzler, and it can't be duplicated anywhere but at your Merkur shop. An overhead console features, among various lights and switches, an electronic display for time of day, date, elapsed time, and outside temperature. This window glows green when the instrument lights are on,



but it's not controlled by the dimmer, which makes it very distracting at night.

Putting the gadgets aside, the Scorpio strikes us as a comprehensive answer to the problem of highway transit. It unselfconsciously trades away traditional appearance for extra room inside. It

avoids the stern interior feeling usually associated with German cars. And its liquid suspension motions produce a fine combination of comfort and confidence.

In other words, this is a strange and wonderful car, and we look forward to seeing who will buy it. —Patrick Bedard

## Technical Highlights

• The Scorpio is unlike any other car ever sold in America, and the powerplant under its sleek hood is in some ways equally unusual. Although derived from the Cologne-built 2.8-liter V-6 that has powered Capris, Mustangs, and various Ford trucks, it has benefited from an \$84 million redesign for Scorpio duty.

The Scorpio's V-6 still shares enough critical dimensions with the older design to allow its manufacture on the same tooling, but its only obvious carry-over is its 93.0mm bore. Its stroke has been lengthened from 68.5 to 72.0mm, increasing its displacement from 2792 to 2935cc. The block itself has been redesigned for 30 percent greater stiffness with no weight increase. New pistons with slightly dished crowns carry much narrower piston rings, reducing friction. The connecting rods are forged with thicker sections, and a new cast-nodular-iron crankshaft has six counterweights.

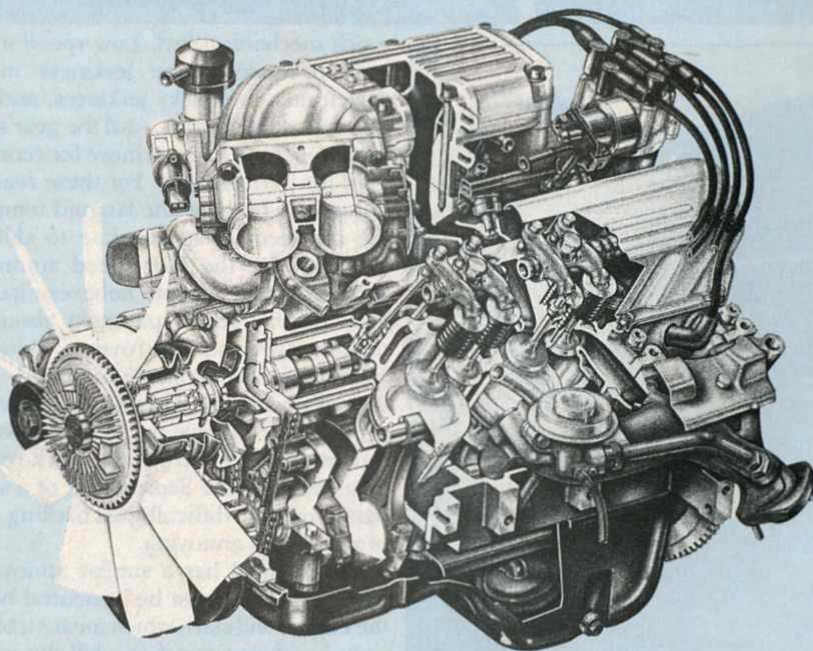
The redesigned cylinder heads are probably the greatest advance over the old engine. The siamesed exhaust ports are finally gone, replaced by three separate exhaust passages for each head. The resulting breathing improvement is enhanced by a new high-swirl combustion-chamber shape, which combines with a centrally positioned spark plug to extract the most energy from each intake charge. The compression ratio is 9.0:1.

The goal of many of these changes

was to produce the best possible torque curve. One of the most unusual measures adopted toward this end is the engine's dual intake system. Ford engineers stumbled onto this unique approach when they were working on a version of the engine in which one of the banks of three cylinders could be turned off to improve fuel economy. That idea was shelved, but the engineers kept the dual-manifold arrangement, having found that it produced a better torque curve than any alternative. Each bank of

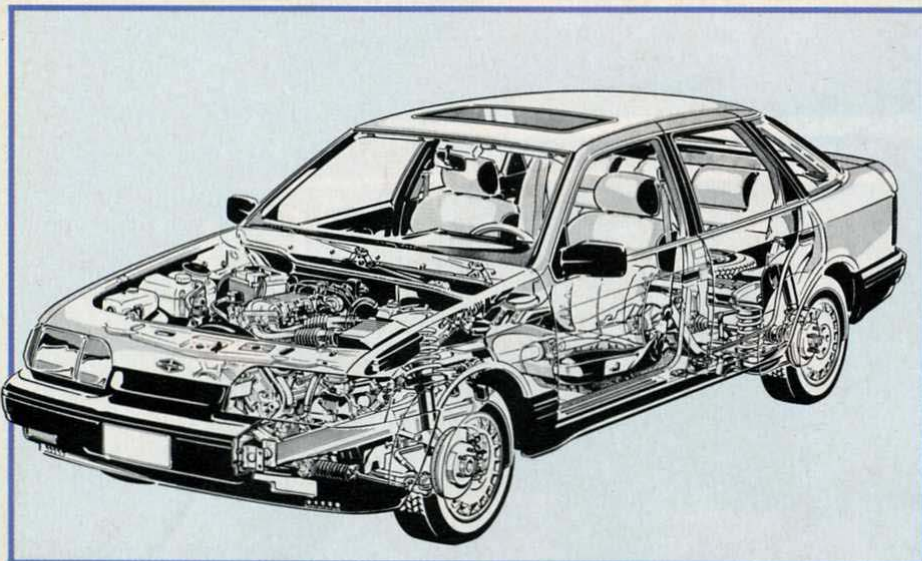
cylinders breathes through its own manifold, throttle body, and intake plumbing. The only communication between the two banks is a small port that equalizes manifold vacuum at low rpm, promoting a smooth idle.

All of this effort pays off with 144 hp at 5500 rpm and 162 pound-feet of torque at 3000 rpm. Moreover, at least 90 percent of the peak torque is available from 1800 to 5200 rpm. That's not bad for an engine that dates back to 1964. —Csaba Csere





# MERKUR SCORPIO



**Vehicle type:** front-engine, rear-wheel-drive, 5-passenger, 5-door sedan

**Price as tested:** \$26,000 (estimated)

**Option on test car:** touring package (includes leather upholstery, power moonroof, and trip computer)

**Standard accessories:** power steering, windows, seats, and locks, A/C, cruise control, tilt steering, rear defroster and wiper

**Sound system:** Ford AM/FM-stereo radio/cassette, 6 speakers

## ENGINE

Type ..... V-6, iron block and heads  
 Bore x stroke ..... 3.66 x 2.83 in, 93.0 x 72.0mm  
 Displacement ..... 179 cu in, 2935cc  
 Compression ratio ..... 9.0:1  
 Engine-control system ..... Ford EEC-IV with port fuel injection  
 Emissions controls ..... 3-way catalytic converter, feedback fuel-air-ratio control, EGR, auxiliary air pump  
 Valve gear ..... pushrods, hydraulic lifters  
 Power (SAE net) ..... 144 bhp @ 5500 rpm  
 Torque (SAE net) ..... 162 lb-ft @ 3000 rpm

## DRIVETRAIN

Transmission ..... 5-speed  
 Final-drive ratio ..... 3.64:1, limited slip  

Gear	Ratio	Mph/1000 rpm	Max. test speed
I	3.36	5.9	37 mph (6200 rpm)
II	1.81	10.9	68 mph (6200 rpm)
III	1.26	15.6	97 mph (6200 rpm)
IV	1.00	19.7	117 mph (5950 rpm)
V	0.83	23.7	110 mph (4650 rpm)

## DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITIES

Wheelbase ..... 108.7 in  
 Track, F/R ..... 58.1/58.1 in  
 Length ..... 186.4 in  
 Width ..... 69.5 in  
 Height ..... 54.6 in

Frontal area ..... 22.2 sq ft  
 Ground clearance ..... 5.2 in  
 Curb weight ..... 3240 lb  
 Weight distribution, F/R ..... 52.5/47.5%  
 Fuel capacity ..... 16.9 gal  
 Oil capacity ..... 4.5 qt  
 Water capacity ..... 9.0 qt

## CHASSIS/BODY

Type ..... unit construction with 1 rubber-isolated crossmember  
 Body material ..... welded steel stampings

## INTERIOR

SAE volume, front seat ..... 50 cu ft  
 rear seat ..... 45 cu ft  
 trunk space ..... 20 cu ft  
 Front seats ..... bucket  
 Seat adjustments ..... fore and aft, seatback angle, height, lumbar support, upper side bolsters, thigh support  
 General comfort ..... poor fair good excellent  
 Fore-and-aft support ..... poor fair good excellent  
 Lateral support ..... poor fair good excellent

## SUSPENSION

F: ..... ind, strut located by one lateral link and an anti-roll bar, coil springs  
 R: ..... ind, semi-trailing arms, coil springs, anti-roll bar

## STEERING

Type ..... rack-and-pinion, power-assisted  
 Turns lock-to-lock ..... 2.7  
 Turning circle curb-to-curb ..... 34.1 ft

## BRAKES

F: ..... 10.2 x 1.0-in vented disc  
 R: ..... 10.4 x 0.4-in disc  
 Power assist ..... hydraulic with anti-lock control

## WHEELS AND TIRES

Wheel size ..... 6.0 x 15 in  
 Wheel type ..... cast aluminum  
 Tires ..... Pirelli P6, 205/60HR-15  
 Test inflation pressures, F/R ..... 32/32 psi

## CAR AND DRIVER TEST RESULTS

### ACCELERATION

	Seconds
Zero to 30 mph	3.0
40 mph	5.0
50 mph	7.1
60 mph	9.6
70 mph	13.3
80 mph	17.0
90 mph	24.1
100 mph	32.6
Top-gear passing time, 30-50 mph	12.4
50-70 mph	12.8
Standing 1/4-mile	17.1 sec @ 81 mph
Top speed	117 mph

### BRAKING

70-0 mph @ impending lockup ..... 191 ft  
 Fade ..... none moderate heavy

### HANDLING

Roadholding, 300-ft-dia skidpad ..... 0.76 g  
 Understeer ..... minimal moderate excessive

### COAST-DOWN MEASUREMENTS

Road horsepower @ 30 mph ..... 6 hp  
 50 mph ..... 15 hp  
 70 mph ..... 34 hp

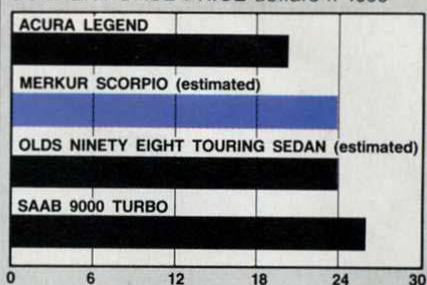
### FUEL ECONOMY

EPA city driving ..... 17 mpg  
 EPA highway driving ..... 23 mpg  
 C/D observed fuel economy ..... 19 mpg

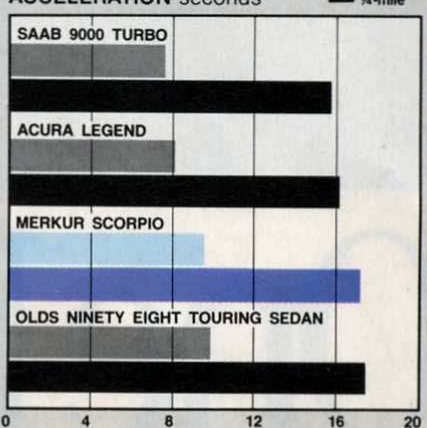
### INTERIOR SOUND LEVEL

Idle ..... 48 dBA  
 Full-throttle acceleration ..... 76 dBA  
 70-mph cruising ..... 68 dBA  
 70-mph coasting ..... 67 dBA

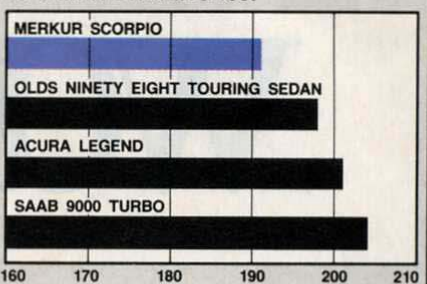
## CURRENT BASE PRICE dollars x 1000



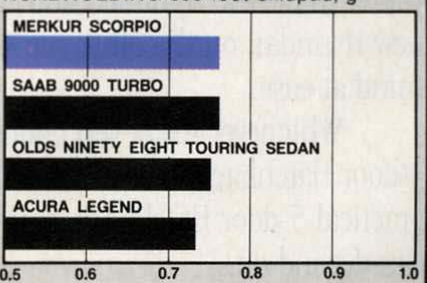
## ACCELERATION seconds



## 70-0 MPH BRAKING feet



## ROADHOLDING 300-foot skidpad, g



## EPA ESTIMATED FUEL ECONOMY mpg

